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# Diversity Enhanced

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# DIVERSITY ENHANCED

by Carmaletta Williams

Executive Director for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion



An original mission of The Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (ODEI) included moving our community past worn-out, torn-up, age-old, binary thoughts of “diversity.” People easily grasped onto racial and ethnic, as well as gender and GLBT (gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender) issues.

Religious differences were occasionally whispered about and, in this historic time, discussions of opposing social and political ideologies surfaced. But a shroud of sort, what the early 20th century intellectual W. E. B. DuBois, as did others, called “the veil of distortion” created a rather narrow lens through which we saw “diversity.”

This year we have cracked the glass ceiling, reduced myopia, and expanded our visions to include many diverse cultures. We have celebrated heritage, honored the past, become more informed about art and learned about the autism spectrum. The most exciting aspect of our work this semester is that most of these ideas were brought to us by our on-and off-campus JCCC community.

Dr. Kami Day is very modest in her explanation of who the Diversity Fellows are and what they do. That’s actually an endearing part of her. She is modest about her vast contributions to our school, and she is a bit shy. But she, like the other Fellows, is extremely hard-working and creative. She and they certainly do much, much more than she includes in her article. All the Fellows are intrinsically involved in the work of the ODEI in advancing this institution. All of

us work on every program, every workshop and every conference we sponsor. We meet weekly to discuss issues and means of creating a culturally competent campus. These discussions are the most interesting of any I have ever encountered here. We are all very different people and our diverse realities bring us to new understandings and insights. Then we work on devising means to bring those perspectives to the campus community.

On the front burner for the ODEI is a campus climate survey. Our goal is to have a broad spectrum of our population participate in this process from issuing the request for proposals, to choosing the survey firm, to monitoring the survey process. Kami and Dr. Shaun Harris are spearheading that work. We need to see where we are and where we have been so that we can better focus our efforts to move forward. We will make this process as transparent as possible because this survey is for the good of the institution and not just for the ODEI. All of us will benefit from having solid data and information.

Lisa Cole, Amber Smith and Samira Hussein – our math and business Diversity Fellows – bring a very clear, quantitative eye to the ODEI. They see cultural change in terms of promising futures for our students and community. They actively seek opportunities to help both current and potential students. At a Women of Color Administrators in Higher Education forum in Atlanta, Georgia, a woman saw my name and school affiliation on the roster and found me in that group of more than 150 women to tell me that Lisa Cole is amazing in her commitment to helping high school students in their quest for college. I couldn’t stop smiling.

Of course, I know that she is amazing, but Lisa, like Kami and the others, has been shy in talking about all of the work she does to help students. She is “walking the walk,” and investing her energy in making sure that students who want to attend college understand that they can. This is in addition to her position as a Diversity Fellow for faculty and staff recruitment and retention. Amber Smith is energetic and absolutely involved in a comparable student-centered process. She is planning workshops, conferences and summer camps to familiarize especially first-generation students with college. All of our Fellows are involved with the community above and beyond the call of duty and give presentations and workshops, but Samira Hussein is probably the most active. She has earned the reputation as a powerful speaker which causes people to call on her to talk to their community groups, their students, their parishioners, friends, etc. Her work has been acknowledged in the many awards that she has earned. The ODEI certainly could not function without the hard work and commitment of our two administrative assistants, Susan McGarvey and Kay Rozell.

Danny Alexander is also very low-key but incredibly active. Under his guidance, we have hosted the Latino Writer’s Collective, the South African Freedom Fighter Eddie Daniels, the diversity book discussions, and other programs. Just a glance at our monthly program posters illustrates the depth of his work and that of the Diversity Fellows and the ODEI. New to this issue of *Many Voices* are reviews of the programs for those in our community who were unable to attend the events. Danny has been especially active working with student organizations. Under his guidance Latinos United Now and Always (LUNA) was established and student-led multicultural events are being planned. Danny has a wonderful spirit that allows him to work well with what is truly a diverse Johnson County community.

Our on-campus community outside of the Diversity Fellows has also been invaluable in advancing our work. There is always the danger of leaving out names when you make a list, and there are so many people who work with us that it is impossible to list them all within the confines of this article, so I apologize right now. People like Linda Jameson, Mark Foster, Pete Peterson, Mark Browning, Kim Krebs, Bill Buese, Miguel Morales, Andre Jones, Anthony Perry, Andrea Kempf, Gloria Rosso, Mary Jean Billingsley, Maureen Fitzpatrick, Rich Fisher and the television folk, Marilyn Jones, Minnie Adams, Bruce Harvey, Karen Martley, plus all the people who pitched in to help with the *Autism Spectrum Disorder: Beyond the Diagnosis Conference* were invaluable to us. Sean Daley and Diane Kappen deserve a special note of appreciation from us. They made connections for us for the autism conference, Deaf awareness programs and American Indian programs. Allison Smith, Bruce Hartman and

Karen Gerety Folk have been gracious in tying their art tours with our activities, as has Angel Mercier in arts education. So many of you have been life and program savers, and we thank you. We also want to extend a special note of gratitude to Bob and Kathleen Xidis for the E. Claire Xidis doll collection.

The larger Johnson County community also came together with the ODEI, especially with the autism conference. Kirsten Sneid, Kate Duffy, and Drs. Kathryn Ellerbeck, Debra Kamp and Matt Reese from KU Medical Center informed our audience with solid information about life “Beyond the Diagnosis.” In addition to our own people, Janice Bonat, Ben Edwards, Kathryn Dingley, Connie Happel, Alex Happel, Kirsten Sneid and Aaron Wagner from our larger community participated especially in making the video for the conference. The video as well as other conference sessions are available on our Web site, [www.jccc.edu/ODEI](http://www.jccc.edu/ODEI). Included in this issue is a special section on the conference. There were many community organizations that also provided us with brochures and other important information. To all of you we are very grateful.

We have permanently borrowed the slogan of the Autism Self-Advocacy Network, “Nothing about Us without Us” in all our work. We recognize that we still have a long way to go to achieve our goals, but to that end, we have let our diverse communities speak for themselves. Articles in this second issue of *Many VOICES – One Community* remind us of the power of diversity in creating a rich learning environment for our students, a place of respect and understanding for them and our faculty and staff, and a means of inclusion for our entire community.

